

Testimony - Next Generation Connecticut  
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Senators, my name is Kevin Burgio, and I am here today to thank you for the investment the state of Connecticut has already made in me through its support of the University of Connecticut, and to ensure that you understand the transformative power of your investments in higher education.

I am the first person in my family to go to college, and I might never have gone myself. During high school, I was not particularly interested in academics. Instead of going to college, I joined the United States Air Force and served for six years as a combat medic and dental hygienist. When I decided to go to college with the support of the GI Bill, my high school record ruled out Harvard or Yale. I live in Connecticut, and UConn took me, so I went to UConn.

UConn changed everything for me. After serving in the military, I had the discipline and motivation to do well academically, and that led to an opportunity to work in Dr. Margaret Rubega's ornithology lab. My work on her NSF-funded project on invasive birds led to the development of my own research on Monk Parakeets. It might seem to you that research on birds is not likely to have any economic impact, but the Monk Parakeet is a non-native bird that build nests on utility poles; if any one of you were subject to all the electric service minutes lost to parakeets shorting out the wires in the U.S., you would go without electricity for NINE YEARS. Control of the birds is costing utilities in CT \$70,000/year; the costs in Florida where there are more of them, is more than \$1 million/year. Our research has led to the design of a non-lethal device that can keep the birds from nesting on the poles; we are currently seeking patent protection, and investment to manufacture the device; we expect utility companies in 14 states to have an interest in installing these devices on tens of thousands of poles.

During my time at UConn, I have won entrance to the University Scholar program, UConn's highest academic honor, and a Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship, the nation's most prestigious science fellowship for undergraduates. I am now enrolled in the Ph.D. program at UConn; my undergraduate training helped me win a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, the nation's most competitive award for graduate students.

I feel like I've done pretty well for a guy who didn't have any interest in academics in high school. I received an excellent education; I got a new version of myself as a nationally competitive scientist and problem solver; it looks like I'm going to get a business. I am raising a family here; I have every intention of staying in CT after I finish my degree, and contributing to the economy. I see Next Generation Connecticut as an excellent investment in making my story more common.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.